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LETTER DATED 23 DECEMBER 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit a statement dated 22 December 1999 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement dated 22 December 1999 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Georgia is deeply concerned by the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation dated 21 December 1999, which absolutely without foundation accused Georgian authorities of "launching a noisy campaign of attacks against Russia", aiding Chechen terrorists, attempting to upset the friendly relations between Russia and Georgia etc.

Having itself experienced all the consequences of aggressive separatism and international terrorism, Georgia has always called for uniting efforts in the struggle against this evil. That has been our position since the situation in the North Caucasus first began to deteriorate because we do not accept the use of different standards to settle similar issues. Georgia has repeatedly appealed to the Russian side to renounce unsubstantiated declarations and accusations and to coordinate the actions of the corresponding structures of the two States with a view to contributing to the stabilization of the situation.

In reply, we have heard only new unfounded accusations. Unfortunately, the latest statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has also been made in the same spirit.

It has been repeatedly explained to the Russian side why Georgia has refrained from allowing the use of its territory by Russian military and border troops in the process of their operation in Chechnya. Such a step would inevitably be followed by a spillover of military operations onto Georgian territory, a destabilization of the South Caucasian region that would be fraught with irreparable consequences for Russia itself.

At the same time, in order to remove mutual suspicions the Georgian side has offered to deploy Russian and Georgian observers, respectively, on the Chechen and Abkhazian segments of the Georgian-Russian State border.

Because of the delay by the Russian side in resolving the issue, Georgia has appealed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to organize an international observation mission on the Chechen segment of the Georgian-Russian border, with the participation of Russian representatives. The Russian representative also voted for a positive resolution to be passed by the OSCE Permanent Council on the issue.

The Russian side must also be aware of the contents of the conclusion reached by the OSCE mission after its visit to the environs of Shatili village, which did not reveal the least trace of the alleged presence of Chechen fighters. Thus, the accusations included in the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, with a reference to OSCE representatives concerning "Chechen fighters feeling themselves at ease on Georgian territory", is pure invention.

Equally ungrounded in fact are the accusations of Georgia opening a "window" through the border, "supplying fighters with arms, ammunition and finances", or intending to accommodate the so-called "Chechen government in exile" in Georgia. As to Chechen separatists allegedly holding negotiations with the representatives of the international terrorist Ben Laden, that claim has been refuted by Russian law enforcement agencies themselves.

Georgia, as a democratic State guided by the principles of humanism and strictly adhering to its international commitments, could not deny grant of asylum to thousands of women, children and elderly people fleeing military operations, or deny medical assistance to the sick and seriously wounded. The Russian side is well aware that in Georgia itself there are hundreds of thousands of refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia who have no access to the most basic living conditions. It was this situation that compelled Georgia to appeal to the United Nations, other international organizations and friendly States, including Russia, to render assistance in the face of the aggravated humanitarian situation.

It is bewildering that in view of the above the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation is accusing Georgian authorities of "supporting separatists and terrorists, providing them with a platform for anti-Russian pronouncements" and undermining Russian-Georgian relations. Such accusations can only be regarded as cynical. The role played by certain forces of Russia in the tragic events in Abkhazia, Georgia, when specially trained Chechen fighters were smuggled in to support the Abkhaz separatists, is universally known. For several years now, in spite of the insistent demands of Georgia to extradite the international terrorist Igor Giorgadze, he has enjoyed an obvious patronage in Russia, being regularly, including in recent days, provided with a platform for subversive statements against Georgia.

The Russian side has not yet found it possible to acknowledge the repeated shelling of Georgian territory by the Russian air force, and still stubbornly disclaims the obvious facts in spite of the existence of undisputable evidence and even witnesses in the person of the representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited to Tbilisi and journalists.

It is noteworthy that a further shelling by the Russian air force of the borderline territory of Georgia, resulting in the wounding of four Georgian border guards, took place on 22 December 1999, after the issuance of the above-mentioned statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia categorically refutes the slanderous accusations addressed to Georgia, and affirms that such accusations against a sovereign State, especially on the threshold of presidential elections in Georgia, can be interpreted as an unfriendly step with far-reaching consequences, all responsibility for which rests with the Russian side.